



**Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Southern District of Texas**

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FEMALE TRUCK DRIVER CONVICTED OF ALIEN SMUGGLING

LAREDO, TX – Alisa May Lapier Hernandez, 35, of Laredo, Texas, was convicted by a jury's verdict on Thursday, July 20, 2006, of transporting 16 undocumented aliens in a tractor-truck she was driving, United States Attorney Don DeGabrielle announced today.

During the two-day trial that began on Wednesday, July 19, the United States presented evidence through the testimony of senior Border Patrol agents and two of the 16 Mexican nationals discovered in the sleeper cab of Hernandez's tractor-truck.

The jury learned that on April 28, 2006, Hernandez driving a red 1996 Freightliner tractor-truck (no trailer) stopped at the IH-35 checkpoint located 29 miles north of Laredo, Texas, for an immigration inspection. Hernandez and her passenger, the only other visible occupant in the tractor, told Border Patrol agents they were U.S. citizens. Because a Border Patrol service canine was alerted -- a recognized signal indicating the presence of contraband or people -- at the small exterior door below the sleeper portion of the cab, the Border Patrol agent handler of the service canine requested a secondary or more thorough inspection.

At the secondary inspection area and prior to doing his inspection, the Border Patrol service canine handler asked Hernandez whether there was any other person inside the tractor-truck. Hernandez told the agent she was paid \$500 for fuel, hotel expenses, and "to take them." Upon inspecting the interior of the sleeper, the agent discovered 16 undocumented Mexican aliens all tightly accommodated in various berths and compartments within the sleeper located behind the driver's seat of the vehicle.

Two of the 16 aliens testified at trial. Both had traveled to Nuevo Laredo by way of bus from Jalisco and Aguas Calientes, respectively, and entered the United States by wading across the Rio Grande River in the vicinity of Laredo, Texas, around April 27, 2006. Having come separately and having made separate arrangements and not knowing the other, they each were taken to separate trailer homes where they spent the night and were picked up the next day and transported to the parked tractor.

The first Mexican national testified Hernandez had been in the driver's seat of the tractor-truck when he got in and that they waited for over four hours while others arrived by ones, twos, and threes. The second Mexican national who testified stated he arrived with a later group and also saw Hernandez in the driver's seat. Both witnesses testified that Hernandez drove them to

the checkpoint, and after passing primary inspection stated, “We have been caught. You can run if you want to.”

At trial, Hernandez testified that she did not know the aliens were hidden in the sleeper compartment of her tractor-truck and offered testimony about a drug addiction to explain her lack of knowledge

Hernandez faces a maximum of 10 years in federal prison, without parole, and a \$250,000 fine at sentencing, at a date that will be determined by the Court.

This case was tried by Assistant United States Attorney Robert F. Ramirez.

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